

Hartford Courant

In Wallingford, Tony Bennett Is Smooth, Suave And Affable

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JAVA

May 22 2007

He proved without a doubt that age is only a matter of mind, even though he is a card-carrying member of AARP.

The event may have been part of his AARP-sponsored "The Best Is Yet to Come" concert, but octogenarian and star crooner Tony Bennett defied the "over the hill" stereotype as he had a sold-out audience repeatedly begging for more Sunday at the Chevrolet Theater in Wallingford during his nearly two-hour, intermission-free concert.

And after six standing ovations, the legendary singer, who makes being over-50 so very cool, headed into a private, CPTV-hosted dessert reception, where fans of all ages gushed over the guy, who was polite, engaging and introspective - and along the way, may have given a 16-year-old musician the break that could change his life.

But first things first. Bennett, best known for timeless hits including "Because of You" and "Steppin' Out With My Baby" was suave but oh-so-approachable as he walked into the room full of admirers, who listened to his thoughts on a variety of subjects including his singing, his artwork and his philosophy on life.

"You are never too old to do what you want to do," insisted the energetic entertainer as he graciously accepted accolades from fans who crowded into the room. "And I am pleased to be singing to the whole family, not just certain generations," said Bennett, who defied time with his 2006 dual-Grammy-winning CD "Duets: An American Classic" featuring him with other singers including Sting and Paul McCartney.

Sunday's VIP session undoubtedly had special meaning to 16-year-old **Noah Lis**, who came from Massachusetts to make his own musical pitch to the star.

"I want to give you this CD I made; would you listen to it?" he boldly asked Bennett.

"Sure bring it here," said Bennett, inviting the teenager to the front, after recalling his own breaks that helped his career.

"I already like it just based on the title," encouraged Bennett. "'Simple Things,' that says a lot."

Asked if he is as romantic as his music, Bennett - who is also an accomplished painter with a new, limited-edition book of his works coming out later this year - blushed a bit.

"That's too personal," he said flashing his signature smile.

And as far as his recent stint as a music mentor on "American Idol" and his own predictions about the next would-be singing star?

"I don't know. But it amazes that over 60 million people watch that program," he said, shaking his head. "But I definitely am looking forward to Wednesday to find out who will win."

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